No. 86

The REDEMPTION of Marie Gordon

THE TRAGIC STORY OF WRONGED WOMANHOOD

Price 10¢

Her indomitable spirit rose in hot rebellion. She would not allow herself to become the prey of this man whom she had hoped never to see again.

R. of M. G., No. 86.

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Chapter 285

"I FORGIVE YOU!"

EVER SINCE she regained consciousness Alice had been laboring under the fearful impression that she had revealed certain secrets of her past. That she had spoken of her relations with Earl Cortland and Larry Coleman.

The assurance of the nurse that she had not mentioned any names, lifted a terrible weight from her troubled heart.

Yet in spite of all that, she was anxious to be rid of her nurse. There had been moments when she thought she read a mute accusation in those innocent blue eyes.

Then she had a vague suspicion that this cultured and refined woman was masquerading in the garb of a nurse.

Yes, sometimes she feared that she had been engaged purposely to spy upon her. Her mind was already settled on one point.

The first favor she meant to ask of her husband when he arrived, was to send this young nurse away.

There was no necessity of keeping her any longer, since she would be able to resume her duties as the mistress of the house in a few days.

For that reason she sat at the window and gazed in the direction from which her husband was to come.

Whenever she saw an automobile approach the villa, she expected to see her husband alight. It was toward evening when his dark green touring car hove in sight.

It came to a sudden stop at the gate, and his first

glance was up at her window.

He saw Alice and waved his hand with a smile. The next moment he came running toward the house.

Alice had risen excitedly from her seat, and stood at the window. The nurse knew by her agitation that Mrs. Ames' husband had arrived.

She had no particular desire to witness the meeting between wife and husband.

When she asked leave to go to her own room for a few moments, Alice granted her request readily. The instant the nurse closed the door behind her, Alice ran swiftly to the mirror.

With a dexterous movement she put some rouge on her pale cheeks. Her eyes had suddenly regained their wonderful luster, and they flashed the fire of a happy anticipation.

She was awaiting the entrance of her lover and king, and her heart rejoiced. He had come back instantly, because she requested it.

The next moment his tall figure stood in the open doorway, and stopped a couple of paces before her.

She staggered like one blind and dazed.

"Robert!" she cried happily. "Robert, thank God you have come back."

Her heart was beating madly, her blood was afire. She made one step forward and reeled into his outstretched arms.

The heart of the man was torn with remorse and shame, while hers beat wildly with joy and triumph.

She yielded herself in utter abandonment to him, in those first moments of delirious happiness. She could scarcely grasp the truth.

The man whom she loved with all the power of her passionate soul had come back her lover.

She tried to understand the complete change in

him. She was content to rest in his arm while his low voice fell upon her eager ears.

"Alice — wife, can you forgive me?" he stammered. "It was heartless for me to leave you when your very life hung in the balance."

"I forgive you freely and with all my heart," she answered in a trembling voice. "Now you are all my own lover and husband. Oh, I am happy; yes, far happier than I deserve."

At last she disengaged herself from his embrace.

Robert Ames put his hands on her shoulders and looked deep into her dark, passionate eyes with a bold gaze.

"Alice," he said under his breath. "You are beautiful! And to think that I have been willfully blind to it all. I will make you happy, if you will let me."

"You have promised that before, Robert," she smiled back at him. "My only hope is that you will keep it this time."

With a gentle motion he drew her down to a seat.

"Poor Alice," he continued, "I am glad that you are now on the road to recovery. Jackson has told me everything. I am more sorry than I can say that those telegrams failed to reach me. I had changed hotels and consequently they were not delivered to me."

She looked up at him with a happy smile.

"It was kind of you to hasten home on my account," she said. "I am afraid that Jackson frightened you unnecessarily. There was no real danger at any time."

"I was contemplating to return to Philadelphia the very moment when Jackson arrived," he replied. "My business there had been concluded, in fact my presence was no longer desired."

He smiled mysteriously as he thought of Arthur Vernon.

Robert was anxious to hear from Alice's own lips the reason for her sudden collapse.

He feared to touch upon the subject, however. This was particularly unpleasant to him.

It seemed that Alice divined his thoughts.

"Of course, you want to know what was responsible for this unexpected illness, Robert," she said hesitatingly. "I will tell you gladly, if you desire to hear about it."

He nodded his head.

"I am ready to listen, Alice," he answered with his face averted.

She studied the floor for a few moments. It was evident that she was fighting her growing embarrassment.

"I presume you have been told that I was terribly frightened by the appearance of a stranger," she flushed. "This happened on the same day when you left for New York.

"I had been on a shopping tour. When I approached the villa I saw this mysterious stranger come toward me. I could have sworn it was the man whom I met in Venice and who swore to kill me because I repulsed his advances.

"What happened after that I do not remember, but I have been told that I called his name loudly before I swooned."

She intercepted Robert's glance.

"There is a possibility that this man might have been a former enemy of yours," he suggested.

"May I ask you a question?" she continued in a pleading tone.

"Certainly, Alice. Ask as many as you wish," he

answered.

"This sudden trip to New York, Robert; was it on business, or was it the voice of someone who had a claim on your heart, that called you?"

He looked at her in surprise then smiled on her broadly.

"It was purely a matter of business, Alice," he replied. "I might say urgent business. My secretary, Arthur Vernon, had met with an accident. He was in a sorry plight and needed my assistance. He is on the road to recovery now, however, and he will return to us before long."

She looked at him long and earnestly.

"Then I owe you an apology, Robert," she faltered. "When I was told that a mysterious letter had called you away so suddenly, I took it for granted that this other woman was the writer. This removes a heavy weight from my heart. I am happy now — completely happy."

He took her in his arms and kissed her again and again.

"Alice," he said, his voice quivering, "you can now banish all thoughts of that other woman from your mind. Whatever affections I felt for her has died a violent death. You have suffered enough because of this foolish affair.

"In the future my heart is yours wholly. I shall try to love you as you deserve."

Alice did not notice that her husband's eyes were fastened upon the swaying portiers. They had been drawn aside quickly, then released that same instant.

In this great and wonderful happiness of hers she had completely forgotten the outside world and everything connected with it. Absolutely nothing mattered now. Robert had come back to her. not only as a hus-

band, but as a lover as well.

He was wholly hers, and she was wholly his. No enemy could touch. No scandal monger would dare assail her. A warm feeling of personal safety filled her heart.

"Ah, I wish I could tell you how dearly I love you, Robert," she murmured.

"I—I am glad," he replied, his eyes still fastened on the portieres!

Chapter 286

EARL CORTLAND'S DEATH

ALICE and Robert Ames were seated at the breakfast table. Her eyes were filled with unspeakable love and devotion as she looked at her husband. Since his return from New York she had claimed him as her very own, and she was at this moment the happiest woman in all the world.

The young millionaire seemed to be puzzled about something. A perceptible frown hung on his handsome face. For some reason which no one was able to explain, Alice's nurse had fled from the house.

He had been very anxious to meet her, and especially since Dr. Fielding had praised her beauty and sweet personality in the most enthusiastic terms.

"I cannot understand why this young nurse should have run away in that fashion," he said, meeting Alice's troubled gaze. "I am almost tempted to believe that she wished to avoid a meeting with me."

Alice shrugged her shoulders.

It pleased her very little that her husband had been so desirous of meeting the lovely creature.

"I am afraid you are taking this matter entirely too serious," she reflected. "Perhaps she took offense because I had intimated that her services would be no longer required since your return from New York."

He looked up quickly. The tone of Alice's voice was rather harsh.

"You — you did not quarrel with her?" he ventured.

"Not in the least," she answered promptly. "I

will admit, though, that she carried her head a trifle too high for a nurse."

Robert Ames dismissed the subject. He saw that the discussion irritated his wife. Still he was far from being satisfied.

Alice had risen. She came to his side and put her soft arms around her husband's neck.

Robert Ames also arose. He kissed his wife and retired to the library, preparatory to leaving for his office. He had scarcely entered when Jackson appeared with a letter.

He tore the envelope and read its contents eagerly. The message was from the physician who was attending Cortland, and it read as follows:

Mr. Robert Ames,
Schuylkill River Drive.

Mr. Cortland is in a dying condition this morning. He was fully conscious for several minutes, and during that time he made certain statements, which, in my judgment, you ought to know.

I hope you will find it convenient to call upon me at the earliest possible moment. The matter is very important.

Yours respectfully,
Dr. J. B. Graser.

Robert folded the letter and put it in his pocket. He began to feel a trifle apprehensive.

What was the dying message of this man, whom he had known scarcely three months? And why should it concern him?

He started for Alice's room, but he checked himself quickly. He deemed it unwise to annoy her with this affair, which in no way concerned her.

He touched the bell. When Jackson appeared, he gave orders to have the automobile brought to the door at once.

The hospital in which Cortland was confined was not a great distance from the private sanitarium of Dr. Haines.

As he passed this institution his attention was attracted to its front entrance in some way.

His eyes widened as he found himself staring at the figure of a young woman who led a small boy by the hand.

Her back was turned to him; but the mass of beautiful golden hair and her general appearance struck him to be very familiar.

His first impulse was to stop the machine and follow her. He remembered his important mission, however, and he changed his mind.

Within fifteen minutes the automobile halted in front of the hospital. He jumped out quickly and ran up the stone steps.

Alice had just awakened from a refreshing sleep. It was her wont to take what she called her "beauty nap," every afternoon.

Promptly at two o'clock she retired to her boudor and gave strict orders to her maid not to allow anyone to disturb her.

To-day she was in a most happy frame of mind.

At last she had reached the highest pinnacle of her ambition and desire. Robert Ames, her handsome young husband, had capitulated at last.

What more could she ask?

She smiled triumphantly as she thought of the mighty struggle it had cost her to carry off the victory, but it was worth it.

With an indomitable sprit Alice had overcome every obstacle which rose in her path.

There was nothing to fear since her deadliest enemy was hovering between life and death.

One glance at the stern set face of the wounded man had sufficed to assure her that he was beyond all human aid.

He was the man whom she feared most.

Larry Coleman would be tried for the murder of Cortland. This meant that her other accomplice would also be removed.

The only cloud which appeared upon the otherwise clear horizon of her happiness was the sudden appearance of this mysterious stranger whom she took for her first husband.

Alice experienced a most disagreeable sensation when she thought of this man.

There still remained some doubt in her mind as to whether or not this had been some strange hallucination.

Or had her overwrought brain conjured up the vision of this man, whom she knew to be in Chicago.

She tried with all her might to banish these unpleasant thoughts from her mind.

At last she rose and touched the bell.

From her maid she gained the information that Robert Ames had gone to the city and would not return until evening.

She sat languidly in her comfortable chair, while the maid arranged her wealth of raven locks.

Then she dressed herself in the most becoming fashion and ran down into the library.

Alice was very fond of reading. Romantic stories and fiction seemed to be her favorites. She made herself comfortable in the huge leather chair.

She read until her eyes grew tired, then rose and went up to her boudoir to dress.

It was well toward evening when she emerged. She looked ravishingly beautiful in a soft clinging gown of pale blue silk.

Robert had returned some minutes before, and she hoped to meet him at dinner.

When at last she entered the great dining-salon, she was horrified to find her husband already seated in his place.

What little she could see of his face was frightfully pale. She advanced quickly.

He heard the soft rustling of her skirts and turned to face her. Alice stopped short. A low cry came from her white lips.

"What is the matter—what has happened?" she asked aghast.

"I come from Cortland," was the only answer she received.

"Yes—and what?" she panted, her face growing ashen.

"He is dead."

"Dead?"

He nodded and turned away. It seemed he could not endure the stare of her terror-stricken eyes.

"Is that why you are so agitated, Robert?" she said in a whisper.

"Yes—partly," he replied, still looking away.

Alice stood before her husband with her hands pressed frantically to master a feeling of sickening terror which seemed to have frozen her to the spot.

Robert Ames noticed her frightful agitation and he rose not a moment too soon to intercept her swaying figure.

He led her to a seat and sat down beside her holding her tightly least she faint.

"I am sorry that the news of Cortland's death so upset you like this, Alice," he frowned. "I will say no more about it at this time."

Alice had regained her self-control with a last supreme effort.

Slowly the color came back to her face and she smiled at her husband.

"I am quite ready to hear it all now, Robert," she panted. Her voice sounded strange to her own ears. "Did you say you arrived at the hospital just before Cortland's death?"

"Yes. I received a special message from the attending physician, which led me to believ that Cortland had died some hours ago. When I arrived he was still alive, however, and they made strenuous efforts to bring him back to consciousness.

"Cortland opened his eyes at last and he greeted me with a sign of recognition. He could scarcely speak above a whisper, so I put my ears close to his lips. He spoke of you, Alice."

"Of me?" she gasped.

"Yes, of you. His words were those of warning for me against the fatal beauty of a woman without a soul."

Robert Ames spoke evenly.

Alice's face was growing paler every minute. She sat there perfectly rigid.

"Yes—go on, Robert," she whispered.

"He told me that I was not the first man who had fallen into your snare. Others had walked into it and found a sudden grave. His voice grew weaker and weaker and soon I was no longer able to understand him.

"At last he pointed to the table. I followed his direction and opened a drawer. When I brought forth a package of letters, he nodded feebly. Suddenly he raise himself upon his elbow.

"His eyes stared fiercely into mine, and with a last deseperate effort he gasped, 'Alice was my——'

"He did not finish the sentence. The terrible exertion brought on a hemorrhage. The blood spurted from his mouth and he fell back—dead. Oh, it was frightful and horrible."

Robert Ames looked at his wife with a questioning gaze.

She still sat there with her dilated eyes staring straight ahead.

"Alice!" he cried aghast.

"I am quite well—and listening," she replied in a scarcely audible voice.

"Among the package of letters I found a letter which had been addressed to him. I recognized the handwriting at once. It was your own. I did not open it. I brought it with me — here it is."

"Why—why don't you open it?" she panted

He opened the envelope rather reluctantly and drew out a blank sheet of paper.

"Will you explain this, Alice?"

For an instant only Alice sought for words.

Then she suddenly regained her power of speech, which surprised her husband with its eloquence and plausible excuse for her previous conduct.

She admitted blandly that Cortland had fallen desperately in love with her, and also confessed that she had known him before his first visit to the Ames mansion on Broad Street.

"After he was removed to the hospital," she continued, "he sent me one message after another, pleading for only a word from me. At last I sent him this letter, which, as you see, only contained a blank sheet of paper.

"I presume he was under the impression that it was a declaration of love, which he saw fit to use against me. I am impervious to his slanderous words," she added with a shrug of her shapely shoulders. "As far as this letter is concerned—it speaks for itself."

Robert Ames heaved a sigh of intense relief. His face lost its stern expression.

"I can pardon you readily, Alice," he assented. "My former suspicion that this man was desperately in love with you, was substantiated by his own words as well as by your frank confession.

"After you repulsed him he tried to destroy you. I understand now why he accused you of shooting him in the back that day. He convicted himself further by his own slanderous words, which he uttered against you. Now come, let us forget it."

He folded her in his arms and pressed his lips to her own, which were still cold and lifeless.

Alice regained her normal composure rapidly with such treatment. For instead of the stern rebuke and censure which she had expected, she was now in the arms of her beloved husband.

Triumph and exultation were mirrored in her eyes. Every look and gesture bespoke joy and absolute confidence of herself. That Earl Cortland was dead and had passed forever out of her life, was almost too good

to believe.

And now only Larry Coleman remained to be dealt with. But Alice was not afraid of the possible consequences. Had not Coleman accused himself of shooting Earl Cortland? He would be convicted of murder, and that would be the end of him.

Chapter 287

CORA ALLEN'S PLEA

IN THE spacious, well furnished library of a large handsome house, situated on one of the finest streets in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, two gentlemen were sitting, engaged in an earnest conversation.

That both men were well versed in affairs of the State was evident, for the subject of their conversation was certain political questions that were just then being agitated in the State.

"As far as that is concerned, I suppose we must consider the question settled," said the elder man. "But to change the subject, governor, do you still think the same of the Coleman murder case?"

A slight frown gathered on Governor Farner's handsome face as he answered gravely:

"Yes, I think just as I have thought from the beginning, that Larry Coleman is guilty of murder in the first degree. I believe that the death sentence imposed upon him is a just one, and unless a higher power than mine intervenes, the man will be electrocuted the last day of June."

"There has not been a case in this State for years that has created so much public sympathy as this one," the other replied. "I suppose his youth has a great deal to do with it. It does seem hard for so young a man to die such an ignominious death."

"It does not only seem hard," said the governor, "but it is hard, and as far as I am personally concerned, no one sympathizes more deeply with the condemned

man than I do; but I cannot allow my personal feelings to interfere with the administration of justice.

"This drawer here is filled with letters and petitions imploring me to save that man's life, but if I was to receive a letter from every man in the United States, it would not alter my decision.

"As I said before, I believe Larry Coleman is guilty. How can I then, believing that so thoroughly, commute the sentence of death?

"Other men have died in the electric chair for the same crime which I believe he has committed, why should he escape? I know it is in my power to save him, yet I refuse to do it.

"I could not do it without acting in direct opposition to my own sense of justice. I am very much afraid that in this case the law must take its course."

For a moment there was no sound in the room except the constant ticking of the clock on the mantel.

Finally his friend rose to go.

The governor accompanied him to the door. Then he went back to his desk and began to write.

Suddenly a sweet voice from without cried:

"May I come in, Howard?"

A tender smile lighted up the governor's face, and throwing down the pen, he rose to meet a lovely woman who had entered the library.

"May you come in, Ethel?" he murmured, bending his head and touching with his lips the brown hair which caressed the white brow.

"You surely know that I am never too busy to see you."

For an answer Ethel Farner nestled clolse to her husband.

"I know that you are busy, Howard," she said after a pause, "and I am not going to interrupt you. I

will sit here beside you while you go right on with your work. You may kiss me first, though."

And after having kissed the sweet mouth, he resumed his labors while Ethel looked idly over some letters which were laying on the table.

"Howard."

He raised his head quickly; there was a ring of pain in the voice he loved so well. In one hand his wife held an open letter, the other lay upon his knee as she murmured:

"Howard, must Larry Coleman die?"

Even before he answered her, he took the letter from her hand and hurriedly read it over. It was an appeal from the condemned man's lawyer, and was framed in the most eloquent and pathetic language. He had just received it that morning. His face was grave, almost sad as he took her small hand in his own.

"And you, too, Ethel, plead for this man's life?" he stammered.

She raised her eyes to his.

"No—no, Howard; not if you say that it is right and just that he should die."

He smiled a little bitterly.

"Ah, Ethel, we, who in this world are called upon to decide the fate of others, can only be guided by our poor sense of right and justice. If our judgment prove correct, we can thank God in all humbleness.

"If our judgment should go astray, then God must forgive us. In this particular case it seems right and just to me that Larry Coleman shouldl pay the extreme penalty for his crime."

"Then, my dear husband, I do not plead for him," she said firmly. "From the very beginning of this trial my sympathies have been with this unhappy young girl who still clings to him.

"I suppose she would go to the electric chair with him with a smile on her face if she were permitted to do so."

Their further conversation was cut short by the sudden entrance of a servant, who announced that a lady was very desirous of seeing the governor.

"Will you not stay, Ethel?" the governor said when he noticed that his wife had risen.

"No, Howard," she replied, "I am rather tired. You will excuse me, will you not?"

And with the smile still upon her face, Ethel left the room.

In the hall she met a young woman very closely veiled. She stood motionless against the wall as she passed her.

As the visitor entered the library Governor Farner, who was standing by the table, took a step forward.

He bowed gravely and looked inquiringly at the stranger, waiting for her to introduce herself.

Without hesitation the woman threw aside her veil.

The governor found himself standing in the presence of a young girl of perhaps eighteen. Her pale face still showed traces of recent tears.

"My name is Cora Allen," she said scarcely above a whisper.

Governor Farner bowed again and motioned her to a seat. He took a seat directly opposite the young girl. The room was brilliantly lighted.

The glare of a cluster of electric lights fell upon Cora Allen's face.

The governor was forced to acknowledge that it was a very pretty face; but it was hardly the face of a care-free and happy young girl.

Her eyes dark; and deep set, told a story of sorrow and bitter disappointment. Her face was very white even to her lips, which quivered constantly.

He saw at a glance that this unfortunate young creature had suffered much.

"I have come to plead for a life that is dear to me; a life, if taken away, will rob me of all happiness." she began in a voice that ended in a sob.

"They have said that Larry Colleman must die. They have said that his execution is to take place in less than a month. If it does, he will die for a crime which God knows he never committed.

"I came here to ask you, to implore you to save him. You alone can do it. You alone in all the world can save him from dying a most shameful death. I plead with you, Mr. Governor, for God's sake, please be merciful."

A shade of pity crossed the governor's face. He leaned over and looked earnestly into the face of the heartbroken young girl.

"Miss Allen," he said gently, "I would gladly save Larry Coleman's life, were it in my power to do so, but I am sorry to say, it is not.

"Do you think that if the jury who brought in the verdict had not thought that this man was guilty, the judge would have sentenced him to death?

"Do you think that if I in my heart believed he had not committed this crime, I would hesitate to say the words which would save him? There is no malice in the law; if you could prove his innocence, he would be a free man."

The girl clasped her thin hands together despairingly, rocking herself to and fro, and when she spoke again her voice was strained and unnatural.

"That I cannot prove; I only know and feel that

he is not guilty. He has been wild and reckless perhaps. He has brought much sorrow into my life, but he did not commit this murder."

The governor leaned back wearily in his chair.

"I am very sorry for you, Miss Allen, more sorry than I could express in mere words," he said, "but I regret exceedingly, that I cannot do what you ask."

She looked wildly, despairingly about the room, then back to his face.

"Governor, can you not change the sentence of death to imprisonment for life? Surely that will be punishment enough; for, what could be more terrible than to drag out a long life behind prison walls?

"I know—I feel that the real murder will confess some day," she went on passionately. "Oh, God, do not let me plead in vain."

She suddenly flung herself down at his feet, and lifted her face, convulsed with agony, to his. She raised both of her hands in mute supplication.

Grave and sad was the face of Governor Farner as he rose from his seat.

With a look of pity and genuine compassion in his eyes he lifted the unhappy young girl gently to her feet.

"I will take this matter under advisement, Miss Allen," he said with a visible effort. "In the meantime I want you to make an effort to get a statement from Larry Coleman. I have been led to believe that there were certain facts in the case which he stubbornly withholds.

"Perhaps he may yet be able to save himself in spite of the fact that his own confession weighs heavily against him."

Cora Allen had taken Governor Farner's hand in her and covered it with kisses of gratitude.

She could find no words to adequately express her sentiment.

A moment later the young girl was staggering toward the door.

She was intoxicated with happiness and the newborn hope that the man she loved more than her own life might be spared to her.

Ever since the fatal day of the shooting, the conviction that Larry Coleman was not guilty, had dwelled in her breast.

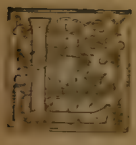
There had been a number of others who shared her belief. When, contrary to their expectation, Larry Coleman was condemned to die, most of them had hurriedly changed their minds.

The fact that a jury, composed of twelve honest men, had found him guilty of deliberate and premeditated murder, seemed to have waned their loyalty.

Cora Allen not for a single moment doubted his innocence, because something way down in her loving and loyal heart told her that her lover was absolutely guiltless.

Chapter 288

CORA'S LAST EFFORT



ARRY COLEMAN was still lingering in a cell of the county jail ot Philadelphia. The hour was drawing near when he was to be taken to the State penitentiary at Harrisburg. There the hideous death cell was yawning for him. He had received his sentence with a stolid indifference.

His face was rather pale as he stood before the bar of justice and listened to the fatal words which were to send him to the electric chair.

A faint smile of satisfaction lurked about his lips. It was the smile of a man who had not been disappointed in his anticipations.

The many curious spectators who thronged the court-room regarded his conduct as a wonderful display of iron nerve.

Many sympathetic eyes followed him as he was being led away—a condemned murderer.

Larry Coleman found solace in the knowledge that he had sacrificed himself body and soul for the woman whose fatal beauty held him enslaved.

He was willing to die, for it would prove to her that his mad and intense love was not a mere whim or fancy.

His thoughts were all of Alice.

There was not a moment during the day that his inflamed mind did not wander over scenes of the past. With a smile on his face he thought of their first meeting in the woods.

The kiss she had imprinted upon his brow that

day was still burning into his flesh.

His mad infatuation for her had dominated his entire being after that. Again and again he had met her.

He little dreamed that he was walking into his own destruction with wide open eyes. He had been led on by her vague promises.

When the crisis came he rose to it like a man or fool. His life without Alice was not worth living.

Without a moment's hesitation he accused himself of a deliberate murder, because he could not bear the troubled look on her face.

The very thought of her languishing in a place which held him a prisoner was unbearable to him.

The opportunity to show his devotion and loyalty had come unexpectedly. It seemed that he could not realize the awful position in which he found himself at this moment.

He knew that he had been condemned to die; but what mattered that since his death would allow this woman to go free.

At this moment he was sitting in the darkest corner of his cell with his face hidden in his hands.

The sudden approach of the guard awoke him from his unpleasant reverie.

The heavy iron bolt in his cell door shot back with a metallic clang.

"Someone wants to see you, Coleman," the hard voice of the guard said. "Come with me."

He rose slowly and followed his jailer with an automatic tread. A moment later he was led into a small room.

The brilliant light which streamed through two barred windows seemed to hurt his eyes, for he put up his hands to shield them.

When at last he dropped them, he found himself standing face to face with Cora Allen. Behind her, with his face averted, stood her father.

"Larry," she gasped as she started forward. With a mighty effort she recovered herself and remained motionless. "Are — are you not glad to see me?"

Coleman met her eager, tearful eyes. His gaze fell before them and he started at the floor.

"We wanted you to know that you are not entirely without friends, Larry," Cora's father interposed, stepping forward. "Will you not shake hands with me?"

The condemned man hesitated a moment, then held out his hand.

"Can you shake the hand that has blood on it?" he said with a suspicious catch in his voice. "Why don't you do like all the others, and turn your back upon a murderer."

"God forbid that I should be your judge, Larry," the old man replied. "You alone know whether or not you are guilty of this awful crime, but I came to tell you that I for one do not believe it."

Coleman looked up quickly. His boyish face flushed.

"And here is one who shares my opinion," Cora's father went on, pointing to the trembling figure of his unhappy daughter. "She wants to talk to you. my boy. You will listen—you will be kind to her?"

Gamekeeper Allen pressed a kiss upon the brow of his child and slowly left the room.

Cora raised her folded hands. The expression of her eyes was one of mute supplication.

"Larry," she faltered, "will you not tell me the truth of this awful affair? You know you could save yourself if you would only say the word."

Coleman started up. His face was deadly pale and drawn.

"What do you mean, Cora?" he gasped.

"I mean that something tells me here," she pointed to her heart, "that it was not your hand which fired that fatal shot. I believe that Mrs. Ames herself has done the awful deed."

"No doubt you jumped at that conclusion because Cortland accused her," he said stubbornly. "Or perhaps your foolish jealousy prompted you to make this assertion."

"No—no, Larry," she pleaded. "I swear to you that there is no malice in my heart. I do not hate her, though she stole you from me and blinded you with her fatal beauty. What I am saying at this moment I say because I know——"

"You know what?" he broke in, his voice rising to a high pitch.

"I know that you are innocent, and that you are sacrificing yourself," she replied quietly.

"I will tell you the truth, Larry," she went on, playing her last card with a look of despair, "I overheard a part of your conversation with her before the shooting."

"So, you played the role of a spy—an eavesdropper," he replied icily. "I can only tell you that your imagination has been playing you false. I can readily understand why you should desire to destroy Mrs. Ames.

"Though you were to succeed it would avail you nothing. I love her with all my soul. I should love her no matter what happened."

Larry Coleman uttered the last words with a vehemence which frightened the trembling young girl. She now realized that she was playing a losing game with her lover. He no longer loved her.

Her heart sank as she listened to the frank declaration of the man who had promised to make her his wife.

She felt her strength slipping away from her. With a last despairing effort she roused herself.

"Larry," she said, her voice breaking into a sob. "Is this all you have to say to me?"

"What else is there to say?"

"Oh God!" she moaned, sinking into the nearest chair, "then this is to be the end."

"Yes, this must be the end," he answered, steeling his heart against her tears of bitter anguish. "I have but one more request—that you leave me."

Cora rose from her seat. She staggered slightly, then groped her way blindly toward the door.

Before her hand reached the knob she fell in a pitiful heap upon the floor.

"Father——" was the only word which came from her white lips before black unconsciousness sealed them.

The next instant the door was quickly opened from without, and Gamekeeper Allen entered hurriedly casting a glance at Larry.

"Cora—Cora, my child!" His voice broke as he gathered her into his strong arms. "May God forgive you for this, Larry Coleman, for I never will."

He carried her like a baby from the room, her wan and thin face resting against his bosom.

A moment later Coleman was led back to his cell.

Old Mr. Allen's heart bled as he stood there and watched the hastily summoned physician apply restoratives to his young daughter.

"How are you, baby?" he cried as Cora opened her eyes at last.

"I—I am alright, daddy," she replied with a piti-

ful attempt to be brave. "But you—you are in tears. You must not——" That was as far as she got, for she fell back into another swoon.

When Cora Allen was brought back to consciousness for the second time, she sat there staring into space.

"What'll I do?" her father asked helplessly as he turned to the physician.

"Take her home and keep her quiet," the man of medicine answered. "And don't mention Larry Coleman's name to her. Her delicate nerves would not stand it."

But even as the physician spoke, the young girl had risen to her feet. And on her face, still frightfully pale, was the look of quiet determination.

Chapter 289

CORTLAND'S LETTER

ALICE stood in the center of her boudoir. She was busy trying on several costly gowns which had been imported for her from Paris, France. She was apparently in a happy frame of mind. Her lovely dark face was wreathed in a pleasant smile, while her black eyes had regained all their former luster and beauty.

He head was raised proudly like that of a queen, fully conscious of her own irresistible charm.

Beneath it all was the glorious knowledge that she had won a desperate and hard fought battle for happiness at the side of her beloved husband.

The last obstacle had been removed. Robert Ames was at her feet a willing slave. He had succumbed at last.

Alice was laying plans for a wonderful future. The doors of the Ames villa were to be thrown open once more to their many friends. She contemplated a series of receptions and balls.

With a tolerant smile she listened to the flattering words of her maid.

Jane was enthusiastic and frank in her admiration of her mistress. She went into raptures as she aided her in trying on the different gowns.

"Ah, this pale blue silk is very becoming. It is perfect," she cried in her ecstacy. "You look simply radiant in that gown, Mrs. Ames."

Alice showed her appreciation of her maid's praise by a nod of her regal head.

Suddenly there came a knock on the door.

"Please see what is wanted, Jane. I cannot be disturbed unless it is something very important," Alice declared.

The maid followed instructions and returned with the announcement that Cora Allen had come to see Mrs. Ames.

Alice seemed puzzled.

"What can this girl want with me?" she mused to herself. Then with a haughty toss of her head she said: "Tell her to come some other time. I am very busy just now."

Jane went to deliver the message. When she returned Alice met her with an eager gaze.

"Well, has she gone?" she queried.

"No, Mrs. Ames," the maid replied. "Miss Allen says it is a matter of importance. She must see you at once."

Alice was still undecided.

A deep frown crept into her face, and the expression of her eyes changed to one of mild fear. Against her will she thought of Larry Coleman.

Could it be possible that this girl came in his behalf, or perhaps had been sent by him?

It was with a show of reluctance that she gave orders to have Cora Allen sent to her room.

She began to pace the floor nervously, but came to a sudden stop when her unexpected visitor was ushered in by the maid.

Alice greeted her with a condescending nod of her dark head.

Her black eyes seemed to penetrate the very soul of this unhappy young girl. Cora remained standing. She was overawed and frightened.

Continued in next number

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